

THE CENSORS' MAGIC WAND:  
The Disappearing Children's Literature

By

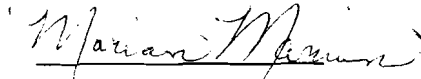
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ABSTRACT

Children's literature has the ability to spark the imagination, to ignite the drive to accomplish, and to go beyond the average. Authors create vivid images in their fictional children's literature to get children to read. The First Amendment gives everyone an opportunity to read what he or she wants. Yet, there are some who choose to censor libraries and schools.

Censorship has been around since the creation of the printing press. Children's books from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to *The Wizard of Oz* have been challenged since their publishing. Reasons for censoring children's literature range from racial issues to using witchcraft within the stories. Censorship has taken deep cuts into what children are allowed to read. Teachers, librarians, and parents find it increasingly difficult to pick out books for children to read for fear of being censored.

One series of books currently on the top of the banned book list is the Harry Potter series created by J. K. Rowling. The purpose of this study is to help parents and teachers

distinguish between facts and misinformation surrounding the controversy of the Harry Potter series. This study will explore the censorship in children's literature, using Harry Potter, to illustrate the fine line faced in selecting a book.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

“In this age of censorship I mourn the loss of books that will never be written, I mourn the voices that will be silenced -- writers' voices, teachers' voices, students' voices -- and all because of fear” (Blume, 2003, n.p.).

An author of children's literature, Judy Blume, wrote what she wanted and was encouraged by publishers. Her imagination and creativity poured out on every page. The words she chose were her own. Not once did she think of worrying about her words sparking such debate. All she wanted to write were honest books (Blume, 2003). Today, Blume is still on the most frequently challenged authors list (ALA, 2003).

Censorship comes in many forms when you talk about children's literature. It can start as simply as an author being careful of what they write. Normally, authors are encouraged by their peers to write freely. After their manuscript hits the editor, then more censorship can take place. This is called pre-censoring. A book that fell into pre-censoring was Robert Munsch's *The Paper Bag Princess*. He was asked by his publisher to write a softer version of the book (Khan, n.d.)

Removing books from shelves or suppressing ideas and information based on what individuals, groups, or government officials find objectionable or dangerous is called censorship (ALA, 2000). As few as an individual can ask to have a book removed. One person's viewpoint can get a book off a shelf before anyone else has a chance to read it and judge it for oneself.

Critics for censorship argue certain books contain objectionable language, explicit depiction of sexual activity, racism, and use of wizardry and magic, just to name a few (ALA, 2002). Some critics have taken extreme measures to make sure their voices are heard by holding book burnings. This symbolic event draws added attention to the novel. The flames of the debate heat up and it actually draws more people to reading and examining what has so many in an uproar. This type of event has happened so much in history that author Ray Bradbury wrote a fictional story, *Fahrenheit 451*, about firemen whose responsibility wasn't putting out house fires, but to burn books.

Laurie Taylor, a mother of two in Fayetteville, Arkansas, approached the school board when she discovered the school library had a sexually explicit book, *It's Perfectly Normal*, and asked that it be taken off the shelf. At first the school board did, but when she came back and wanted to audit all of the library books for material she deemed inappropriate, they put the books back on the shelves. (Crampton, 2006). In a letter to the school superintendent, the National Coalition Against Censorship said that arbitrarily pulling books from the school's library interferes with the educational process and;

The district should respect and support the judgments of librarians, teachers and other educators who select library materials based on their professional and educational standards, as well as students' constitutional right to obtain access to a broad range of materials and ideas, including material that some may find controversial or objectionable. (2006).

The suggested negatives are always the reason for censorship, but what about the benefits of reading or the mere enjoyment books bring on a lazy summer afternoon?

A new series of books has ignited censorship and brought it to the forefront of education and public awareness. The Harry Potter series written by J.K. Rowling has stirred

more controversy than Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. When the fourth book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, was released in 2001, thousands of people lined up at stores waiting for the midnight release (Macpherson, 2003). Reporters compared the frenzy over Harry Potter to people waiting on the docks for the latest Charles Dickens novel (Schafer, 2000). The pre-order frenzy around the fifth book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, has set new pre-sales records (Evers, 2003). All this attention has given rise to the idea that these books may be bad for students and that schools and libraries would do well by taking them off the shelves. People against the Harry Potter series suggest that it is too scary, hateful, violent, evil, disrespectful to authority figures, and it focuses on death.

The most interesting fact this researcher has found in reviewing censorship and Harry Potter is that many people have never read them or have taken them out of context (Neal, 2001) or have based their opinion on misinformation (The Onion, 2000). Connie Neal, while doing research for her book, *What's a Christian to do with Harry Potter?*<sup>2</sup> found people who admitted to making their decisions on censorship before even reading the book or on what others had said. Another group of people based their decision about censoring Harry Potter based on an email that was spreading around the Internet. This email was quoting an article from the newspaper, The Onion, which features tongue-in-cheek stories based on current events.

Proponents of the series have said it stimulates reading, uses a vast number of genres, and has a great character as an unsuspecting hero (Heilman, 2003). Others have said these works of fiction stir compassion, loyalty, courage, friendship, and even self-sacrifice (Neal, 2001).

Harry Potter's popularity is not a new phenomenon. Other books on the 100 most censored books have been scrutinized the same way. Authors from Judy Blume to Mark



Twain have taken hits from censors. With all the controversy and misinformation, many parents have a tough job deciding what to allow their children to read. Censors are able to put pressure on libraries and schools to ban books they deem improper. Schools find it more difficult to include great works of literature in their curriculum in fear of being told to drop them.

The examination of censorship in children's literature will begin in Chapter two with a literature review of three main areas. Censorship in children's literature, will look at the history of censorship.; Who is Harry Potter?, will look at what and whom makes up the series of novels that has caused such attention to censorship. Harry Potter and censorship, will look at reasons why Harry Potter has been censored and some of the landmark cases.

In Chapter three, this study will summarize and recommend actions that can take the place of censorship. There are some simple steps parents, librarians, teachers and administrators can take to use children's literature to educate, stir the imagination, and show the diversity the world has in store just outside the school doors.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

Censorship has taken deep cuts into what children are allowed to read. Teachers, librarians, and parents find it increasingly difficult to pick out books for children to read for fear of being censored. The Harry Potter series of books have ignited censorship to new levels because of the books popularity. How far should censorship be allowed to go? How should Harry Potter be read?

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to help parents and teachers distinguish between facts and misinformation surrounding the controversy of the Harry Potter series. The information

for this study will be collected through online websites, articles, news stories, journals, and books from 2002-2006 school years.

*Limitations of the Study*

Although the researcher has found articles and opinion pieces on both sides of the issue, one person still only writes this study and personal bias is possible to be incorporated into the study. The researcher considers this to have been a limitation to the study.

## CHAPTER II

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review will cover three important factors. The first factor will be about censorship and its impact on children's literature. The second factor will be an overview of the Harry Potter series and its draw to young readers. The final factor will be about how censorship and the Harry Potter series are clashing. What impact is censoring children's literature, like the Harry Potter series, having on students in today's classroom?

*Censorship in Children's Literature*

"Where they have burned books, they will end in burning human beings." (Heine, 1821, n.p.) Heinrich Heine wrote this line in his play, *Almansor*, not knowing that one hundred years later Hitler would authorize the burning of thousands of people. Book burning was a way people sought to suppress thoughts against power or religion. (Day, 2001, pg. 19) Originally when books were written by hand, book burning took care of any existing copy of the author's works. In 213 B.C. Qin Shi Huang used book burning to silence opposition to centralized rule. Dominican monk Savonarola in 1497, in Florence, Italy, had a "bonfires of the vanities" burning books and other objects considered sinful. (McMasters, 2000, n.p.) December 2001, in Alamogordo, New Mexico, Reverend Jack Brock said he was going to have a "holy bonfire". On December 30<sup>th</sup>, Reverend Brock and his congregation set ablaze Harry Potter books. (Lott, 2002, n.p.) In the information age of today, hundreds of thousands of copies can exist of a book as well as having an electronic version available online. Book burning today is symbolic to the early days. To bring attention to books that

are seen as immoral, obscene, or goes against what they deem unsuitable for others to read. (Day, 2001, pg. 64)

“Censorship is the suppression of ideas and information that certain persons—individuals, groups, or government officials—find objectionable or dangerous” (ALA, 2000, n.p.). Censors put pressure on teachers, librarians, or others to suppress information. They do not want to allow anyone to read or view information or allow them to make up their own minds about it. Children’s books have had matters of controversy “nearly as long as the history of schooling in America” (Heilman, 2003, p. 53). Groups or individuals have seen fit to make sure children are “protected from certain kinds of literature” (Heilman, 2003, p. 53). It may sound like the censor is acting irrational or controlling, but in reality the censor believes sincerely his/her interests are in the wellbeing of their community (ALA, 2003). Yet these challenges have torn apart communities (Education World, n.d.).

The result of these censorship attempts has been two opposing sides: one side believes that more suitable materials can usually be found from among the wealth of materials available on most subjects and the other side believes that students’ “intellectual freedom” can be upheld only if students are allowed to examine any available relevant materials in order to gain the insights needed to reach their own conclusions. (Academic Library, 2003, n.p.).

Censorship started well before pen was put to paper. Religious and political leaders would set laws to restrict the people to keep the leaders viewpoints the only acceptable ones. In Egypt, 3400 B.C., rules for acceptable art were put in place and maintained for over three thousand years. Plato and Aristotle were supporters of early censorship. “Aristotle said that young people should be protected not only from words but also from pictures.” (Day, 2001, pg. 20) Many more acts of censorship happened during the period from Aristotle to Pilgrims

landing at Plymouth Rock. America was founded on freedom. The First Amendment is the freedom of speech and yet in 1873, congress passed the Comstock Law prohibiting “indecent material from being delivered through the mail.” (Day, 2001, pg. 23) Even though Anthony Comstock became a special agent for the U.S. Postal Service, he wasn’t the only one censoring. During this same time, the “Boy Scout manuals also warned...that degeneracy was transforming a large proportion of our robust, manly, self-reliant boyhood...(with) doubtful vitality.” (Heins, 2001, pg. 30)

Many reasons are given for censoring materials. Most frequently listed are sexually explicit material, offensive language, anti-American themes, negative or stereotypical portrayal of minorities, occult theme, too violent, promoting a particular religious viewpoint, or promoting homosexuality (ALA, 2003). In 1976, the school board of Island Trees Union Free School District removed several books from the library stating they were “anti-American, anti-Semitic, anti-Christian, and just plain filthy” (Simmons & Dresang, 2001, p. 144). *Catcher in the Rye* has been censored for objectionable language and explicit depiction of sexual activity (Simmons & Dresang, 2001). One of the most censored books to date, aside from the Harry Potter series, is *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. This book has stirred constant complaints for its use of the word nigger repeatedly throughout the text (Simmons & Dresang, 2001). Supporters of the book point to the straightforward look at racism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century America (Miner, 1998).

Another reason children’s literature might get censored is because someone might feel it is not age appropriate material. Censorship you rarely hear about is a person who goes to the library and then slips the book off the shelf and out of the library, never to be seen again. Sometimes a librarian simply removes a book that has become controversial to save

his/her job. "Because of the nature of 'stealth censorship,' it is difficult to document and impossible to quantify" (Staples, 1996, n.p.).

Despite the First Amendment, censorship is all around us and in many forms. When you watch television, you have a choice of what station to watch. The station decides what programs to air. For instance, PAX television airs family friendly programming so you would not see a program like Jerry Springer on that station. So in essence you have a choice of what to watch through various channels, but someone else is also censoring what you watch. News departments censor the material they will present on air or in a newspaper. They have limited space or time in which to present the news. They pick stories they deem interesting enough to keep your attention.

Children's literature has two main locations that are censored: libraries and classrooms. Both areas are looked at differently. More challenges come from classroom readings than from books in a library (Simmons & Dresang, 2001). In the library, students are able to choose books on their own, whereas in the classroom the teacher assigns a book to read. This is the classic censorship. First a teacher assigns a book. Students take the book home. Parents find out what the book is and become concerned. They talk to other parents. One or more of the parents then files a complaint with the teacher, building principal, or to the school board. Lastly some action takes place and decisions are made that can end the debate or throw it into litigation (Simmons & Dresang, 2001). This whole process makes it difficult for teachers to pick books that work with their curriculum AND will not cause controversy in the community. Teachers cannot include every book ever written in their classroom. So some self-censorship goes on within the classroom. Teachers also do not just arbitrarily pick a book. Most books used in the classroom are on lists of recommended children's literature books. The books on this list are usually classic literature, which has

been around for a long time, or the book has received accolades and awards for its quality and content (Simmons & Dresang, 2001).

One author who ends up on the censored list year after year is Stephen King. His books are cited as too violent, sexually explicit at times, and gruesome. Yet his works are taught in the classroom. Literature teachers would defend their decisions on choosing his works because of the great detail he creates in his characters. This reasoning stands up in an essay by a secondary school student,

My favorite book that I read was *It*, by Stephen King. The main reason that I liked this book so much was not the horror but the characters of the kids. Throughout the story, I felt like I knew each and every one of the characters and they were my good friends, I even felt that I had a best friend, Stanly Uris and I also thought of Eddie as a close friend as well. (Power, Wilhelm, & Chandler, 1997, p. 101).

Censorship affects everyone, but one group in particular suffers the most. Children raised in low-income families cannot purchase books at will. So they must rely on public libraries and schools for books to read. So if certain books are kept from the shelves, these children's First Amendment rights are being violated. The birth of the Internet opened the floodgates of information, still children from low-income families do not have access to a computer. This group is the hardest hit group from Censorship (Simmons & Dresang, 2001).

#### *Who is Harry Potter?*

Harry had a thin face, knobbly knees, black hair, and bright green eyes. He wore round glasses held together with a lot of Scotch tape because of all the times Dudley had punched him on the nose. The only thing Harry liked about his own appearance was a very thin scar on his forehead that was shaped like a bolt of lightning. (Rowling, 1997, p. 20).

Describing who Harry Potter is depends on whom you ask. Some will describe him sort of like Charlie Brown who does kick the football (Schafer, 2000). “Harry Potter sparks the imagination” (Hunt, 2001, n.p.). In an interview for the book *Kids’ Letters to Harry Potter* (Adler, 2001, p. 48) Jennifer stated, “Harry and I do have a lot in common in that we are both teenagers growing in an unknown world and exploring new and different things about that world.”

Joanne Kathleen Rowling, or as she’s more commonly known as J.K. Rowling, is the author of the Harry Potter series. From an idea on a train platform in 1990 to a finished novel in 1996, Rowling did what few authors have: she got her first book published (Schafer, 2000).

“The Harry Potter series has the mystery of a Hardy Boys novel, the skillful word use of Dr. Seuss, the imagination similar to Lewis Carroll, and mixes them into an epic comparable to J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*” (Monk, 1999, n.p.). The world of Harry Potter is set in England. From Surrey to northern Scotland, Rowling creates vivid details of the surroundings and in her characters (Schafer, 2000). At the time of this research, six books in the series have been published. Rowling has planned seven books in all. The books are, in order: *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* (1997), *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999), *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000), *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003), and *Harry Potter and the Half-blood Prince* (2005). Harry starts out an eleven-year-old boy in the first book, not knowing his true heritage and learns hard lessons about social class, faith, tolerance, forgiveness and innocence, throughout the series. (Schafer, 2000).

*Harry Potter and Censorship*



Midnight, July 16, 2006, the sixth book in the Harry Potter series, *Harry Potter and the Half-blood Prince* went on sale. By the end of the day over 6.9 million copies had been sold worldwide, breaking one-day sales records for a book (Associated Press, 2005). *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* also broke a record. “At 896 pages, it's the longest children's book ever published. Scholastic's 8.5 million combined initial print run for the book also is the largest first printing ever in the United States, beating even John Grisham's blockbuster novels” (Macpherson, 2003, n.p.). The Harry Potter series originally held several spots on the top of the New York Times bestseller list. Having monopolized this, the New York Times created a new list of Children’s Best Sellers. But, this then left out the “real” status Harry Potter has with children and adults alike. It did not climb the New York Times bestsellers list just by children alone (Heilman, 2003). At the same time, its predecessors have maintained positions on the most banned books for the last 4 years (ALA, 2003). On the one hand, Christians oppose Harry Potter because the books teach witchcraft (Education World, 2000). On the other hand, Harry Potter “gained the Vatican's seal of approval when an official said the books helped children ‘to see the difference between good and evil’ ” (CBS News, 2003, n.p.).

The landmark case against censorship of Harry Potter came from a group of students who created a website, Muggles (Humans) for Harry Potter, in response to the removal of the books from library shelves by the superintendent of schools (Simmons & Dresang, 2001). In Santa Fe, Texas, the superintendent required the books to be only given out with permission slips from parents (ABFFE, 2000). In Columbia, South Carolina, parents protested that the books contained “too much evil, were too dark, and glorified sorcery and the occult, which they argued was irresponsible because of increasing cases of violence at schools” (Schafer, 2000, p. 238). There is one school that has outright banned the

Harry Potter series. It is the St. Mary's Island Church of England Primary School in the United Kingdom. The headmistress said of the banning,

Our ethos on teaching comes from the Bible. The Bible is clear about issues such as witchcraft, demons, devils, and the occult. It says clearly and consistently from Genesis to Revelation that they are real, powerful, and dangerous. Throughout it insists that God's people should have nothing to do with them. (Arendt, 2002, n.p.).

Having the books completely banned can lead some to the “forbidden fruit” instead of away from it (Heilman, 2003). It's the old mother's adage, tell a kid they can't have it and they will try with all their might to get it.

In Melbourne, Australia, a conservative Christian school banned Harry Potter. The principal of the school said, “The Potter books portray and promote witchcraft as normal. It's a problem because as Christians we would say witchcraft and that kind of thing is not good, and yet Rowling portrays it as being good” (The Herald Sun, 2003).

While censors using Christianity as their tool want to censor Harry Potter because of witchcraft, they allow the *Chronicles of Narnia*. Both books have witchcraft in them. Both books highlight good versus evil. Yet the *Chronicles* in most Christian eyes is validated because the writing blatantly shows good and evil, while Harry Potter is chastised because the writing is more subtle.

Although censorship is a hot topic with Harry Potter, challenges to children's literature have actually gone down (Education World, 2000). The reason the issue seems so much bigger is the ability to spin the media. Through blogs, news reports on tv, chat rooms, and even from the pulpit, a slanted view of the Harry Potter series can be found almost anywhere.

Aside from the great story and plotlines within the books, Time associate producer Jennifer Hunt gives a few reasons to consider for reading the series. “Harry Potter sparks the imagination, promotes reading as pure pleasure, can bridge the gap between children and adults, and it’s fun” (2001, n.p.). One fact is that Harry Potter has more children reading and telling their friends (Neal, 2001, p. 3). Harry Potter, after all, is a fictional character built around a fantasy world. Yet parents use the argument that their child may try witchcraft from reading the books (Zimmerman, 2000). To date, this researcher has been unable to find even one case where this has happened.

The Harry Potter series gives children a place, albeit imaginary, they belong. Ask almost any child stuck in the foster care system what they want most and their reply will be to belong to a family. While living with his aunt and uncle, Harry felt like an outsider. “Yet sometimes he thought (or maybe hoped) that strangers in the street seemed to know him” (Rowling, 1997, p. 30). Children seek to belong, to be a part of friends and family. Harry’s aunt and uncle were his family, but the second part of belonging is to be loved. We see early on that there is no love there. But when Harry goes off to Hogwarts he grows close to some of the students and professors there and calls Hogwarts home (Neal, 2001). This can be seen at the end of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* when Harry returns to Surrey and Ron says, “You must come and stay this summer.” Harry says, “Thanks, I’ll need something to look forward to” (Rowling, 1997, p. 308).

Another element that appeals to children is animals. Each student at Hogwarts has an animal. Harry has Hedwig the owl. Children also enjoy anything gross, bizarre, or disgusting (Neal, 2001). A good example would be to watch Nickelodeon and watch children get slimed over and over. They love it. Rowling does the same thing in the Harry Potter series. While battling a troll, Harry’s wand gets stuck in the troll’s nose. After the battle, “he

bent down and pulled his wand out of the troll's nose. It was covered in what looked like lumpy gray glue. 'Urgh—troll boogers.' He wiped it on the troll's trousers" (Rowling, 1997, p. 176-177). A book a child would want to sit down and read at length would also use wordplay. Rowling uses many words from Latin to make up names for spells. Take for example the *Expelliarmus* charm; it is a charm to disarm an opponent (Neal, 2001).

Rowling's ability to make the fantasy world look like reality is her greatest strength. The setting is in reality in the England of today. Hogwarts is a school and thus there are classes, students, homework, and rivalries just like any public or private school in reality. It's in the details of the fantasy that make it seem so real for children while they read. For example, students receive mail at Hogwarts delivered by owl post and live photographs in the wizard paper, the *Daily Prophet*. Wizards have great fairy tale company in the books including, dragons, giants, unicorns, trolls, castles, dragons, and towers. The lines can easily be blurred when something of fantasy, Bertie Bott's every flavor beans becomes a product selling on store shelves for real children to eat (Heilman, 2003).

All the elements that make it appealing are the same elements people are using to challenge it. Censors lump them all together to justify their decision to censor Harry Potter from school classrooms and libraries (Heilman, 2003). Unfortunately, the issues get more confusing with each additional book introduced in the series and with each new challenge presented against them.

## CHAPTER III

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The review of literature found censorship as a tool used to keep certain material from others. One person or a minority of people can determine what a majority of people is allowed to read or see. This sounds like Communist Russia, but this takes place all over the world in varying degrees. A group could be holding a book burning or more simply, a person could file a complaint with a school or library about a certain book.

The Harry Potter series has taken the greatest number of hits toward censorship for two main reasons: First because of its extreme popularity, selling over 200 million books worldwide with just the first 6 books to date. Second because it is a story about wizards and fantasy. Christians have struck out against other books dealing with fantasy like *The Wizard of Oz*. In hopes to limit the ability for children to read these books, individuals or groups try to censor the material. This researcher has seen the opposite happen. In an effort to censor the material, it has just raised the interest to read the books. Part of the popularity of Harry Potter comes from people wanting to know what all the controversy is about. But mostly, the popularity comes from a very well written series with much detail and deep plot lines throughout each book. Connie Neal pointed out in her book, *What's a Christian to do with Harry Potter?*, that the books are here, educators and parents just need to sort out the facts from the fiction (2001). The books have very definite lines of good and evil within them. As Professor Dumbledore points out to Harry in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, "It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities" (Rowling, 1998, p. 333).

From a parents point of view there are a few recommendations you can follow. In the book *Harry Potter's World*, Deborah Taub and Heather Servaty state in their article several things parents should keep in mind: “1) Forbidding the books is not the answer; 2) Know your child; 3) Discuss the topics raised in the books; 4) Help children distinguish fantasy from reality; 5) Provide an adult presence; 6) Distinguish between the books and the movie; and 7) Respect other’s beliefs and viewpoints” (Heilman, 2003, pp. 68-69). The “forbidden fruit” will draw people to it, versus the desired affect of away from it (Heilman, 2003).

“Librarians and teachers are steeped in a long tradition of knowing why they choose books for youth. This must continue” (Simmons & Dresang, 2001, pg. 113). Second-guessing the educational system only leads to confusion and controversy. When you know what the interests of your child are, you will know if Harry Potter will stimulate continued and increasing educational and social values. Thus discussing topics with your child will bring a better understanding to you of what they comprehend. In your discussions, you can reinforce the difference between fantasy and reality. Having you present while they read or you reading to them, will allow them to ask questions or feel more secure during portions of the stories that may be scary to them. No matter your viewpoint on the Harry Potter series, it is important to display respect toward others for their viewpoints. Children pick up on what their parents say and do (Heilman, 2003).

The main reason the Harry Potter series should be allowed in curriculums and on library shelves is that it has promoted reading. Children of all ages have picked up these books, not by prompting, but because they are very well written. A child doesn’t care how many awards a book has won, how many pages it is, or whether a book reviewer liked it or not. They pick up a book for the story between the covers.

For the teachers reading this, before teaching Harry Potter or other books, two things can be taken into consideration. First, communicate with parents about the purpose of using the book in your curriculum. Second, respect the viewpoint of parents not wanting their child to read the book. Have an alternative available (Simmons & Dresang, 2001).

Another way for schools and libraries to reduce censorship in their community is to hold open forums with the community. Let the community become involved in the selection of materials. Some communities form citizen panels. Including members of the clergy, members of the school board, teachers from various levels of education, parents, and also adults without children, allows the panel to be well rounded (Simmons & Dresang, 2001).

In researching this subject, the arguments for and against were both thoroughly covered. Two items stuck out the most. Ben Buchanan is a normal child in almost every respect. His only major limitation is his ability to read. Ben is dyslexic. This disability will turn most people off from picking up a book purely for fun because of the challenge of reading it. Ben wrote a book about his experience with Harry Potter. He said, "Reading Harry Potter was easy. Getting up to the point of being able to read it was not" (Buchanan, 2001, p. 9). The second item that caught the researcher's attention was an article about how many Braille versions of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* were going to be made. According to the Christian Science Monitor (Armstrong, 2003), a first printing of 500 copies will be produced. At first it doesn't sound like much compared to the five million in regular print editions first published. But, Braille books aren't produced quite so easily. A Heidelberg cylinder press prints each page of the book with all the raised Braille text. Then volunteers help collate, fold, and staple each book by hand because if you automated the process with machines, they would smash the Braille.

In the modern age of reality television, we, the educated adults, need to distinguish between that of reality and that of fiction. As a child, did you not want to swing like Tarzan, fight like Luke Skywalker, or have a prince come to your door with a glass slipper? Our parents educated us and gave us credit for knowing fact from fiction. As parents and educators, our goal should be to encourage imagination.

Censoring Harry Potter would take the books off of library shelves, the very shelves the First Amendment protects; the same shelves that children and adults, who are unable to purchase books, pick from to read for education, escape, and fun. Using Harry Potter in the curriculum and in the libraries takes the entire community to work out the function of the books in the classroom. Students can learn many aspects from these books. Character development, plot development, and sentence structure are the English elements that could be learned from the series. Love, family, the different between good and evil, and pure pleasure are some of the moral and social issues that can be gleamed from the Harry Potter series. Censorship cannot be simply stated away with the books containing witchcraft; to truly censor a book, facts need to be presented that show the harm of a book in the hands of a child. The book needs to be taken in it's own context. It is a fictional book meant for pleasure. The Harry Potter series is not how-to books about wizards, witches, or fairy tales.



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